Student Access and Mobility Within the British Columbia Post-Secondary System

A Critical Analysis of Research, Public Policy and the Role of the B.C. Council on Admissions and Transfer

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BRITISH COLUMBIA COUNCIL ON
ADMISSIONS & TRANSFER
SUPPORTING BC's EDUCATION SYSTEM

A Report Commissioned by the
British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer

STUDENT ACCESS AND MOBILITY WITHIN
THE BRITISH COLUMBIA POST-SECONDARY SYSTEM
A Critical Analysis of Research, Public Policy and
the Role of the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to review research and related projects commissioned by the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer; to summarize and integrate the results; and to provide a critical analysis of those results and their implications for public policy respecting admission and transfer of students within the British Columbia system of post-secondary education. The author, a former Co-Chair of the Council, also draws upon his background knowledge of the higher education scene in British Columbia, to supplement the research findings with analysis of selected policy decisions relevant to the development of the system over the past decade.

To provide a context, the report included an historical account of the development of transfer policy, noting those policy decisions which laid the groundwork for current practice. The contributions of Council, particularly in the last decade, were documented with particular emphasis upon actions to ensure greater public confidence in the transfer process. Further comment was made respecting Council's efforts to develop more flexible and innovative approaches to current transfer arrangements with reference to the role of articulation committees, and to the debate over block transfer and the status of the associate degree.

At the time of writing detailed data respecting transfer students were available only from the three largest universities, the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University and the University of Victoria. Analysis of these data indicated that opportunities for transfer students to enter those universities were not increasing and in some cases, declining. Anecdotal evidence suggested that university places were rationed and that quotas were set in a number of programs. Additional data indicated that the level of achievement (GPA) required by students for transfer was rising steadily to maintain the quotas and that published minimums for transfer had little relationship to actual performance levels.

Although a considerable amount of data are currently available, the limitations upon what is known became apparent. For example, very little information is available regarding the number of students who, although qualified, are unable to obtain places in the university of their choice. It is not known what transfer pathways are pursued. There is a paucity of information on the contributions of the BC Open University[1], the university colleges or the University of Northern British Columbia to the transfer process, although attempts to address these questions are currently underway. In particular, the university colleges are designed as both "sending" and "receiving" institutions, and presumably transfer students are pursuing the opportunities these new institutions offer. Royal Roads University is also receiving transfer students, but again no detailed information is available.

British Columbia supports a complex and diversified array of post-secondary institutions whose primary role is to accommodate the needs of students to attain diverse educational goals. With the introduction of alternative "applied" degrees, opportunities for advanced study in technical and vocational education have increased. Consequently, with the demand for places in institutions such as BC Institute of Technology, Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design, and the Technical University of

1 The BC Open University is the degree granting component of the Open Learning Agency (OLA).

BC, student mobility has grown more complex. Current studies reviewed in this report do not address those aspects of transfer.

With regard to the performance of students after transfer, the available data indicated that, while variations occurred by college, by university and by faculty entered, in general terms student achievement justifies public confidence in the transfer process. Given the challenge of entering a university environment, which for some students is quite intimidating, and eventually proceeding to graduation with a baccalaureate degree, accomplished in many cases while working part time, transfer students display an impressive level of individual determination. Following an initial decline in GPA immediately after transfer, student performance improves to a level at graduation reasonably comparable to students who entered university directly from high school.

Studies designated to identify difficulties in the transfer process indicated that well over 80% of potential credits were successfully transferred. In virtually all cases where credit was not granted a legitimate explanation was found. The results emphasized the need for students to follow published procedures and select courses for which transfer credit was formally recorded in the *BC Transfer Guide*.

The report includes a number of suggestions to ensure successful public policy in the transfer process. The need for comprehensive planning involving all post-secondary institutions was particularly evident. Given the limitation on available seats in degree programs, it is essential that rationing be conducted in an equitable and transparent manner. The inclusion of the university colleges, the BC Open University, Royal Roads, the Technical University, the institutes and the two year colleges in a provincial planning exercise is critical to maintain public confidence in a transfer policy which will ensure that optimal access to degree programs is maintained. The tradition of institutional autonomy in admission of students in British Columbia requires participation in planning exercises will be on a voluntary basis. The Council on Admissions and Transfer, however, has and will continue to play a catalytic role in the process.

Since the demise of the Link File[2] it has been impossible to monitor the flow of students from secondary school through the various transfer routes. As this information is essential to fully understand the issues of supply and demand in post-secondary education, a revitalization of the Link File, or an equivalent instrument, is called for.

In summary, studies commissioned by Council and related projects provide a comprehensive picture of a transfer and admissions process in British Columbia. This process is performing successfully, meeting the needs of many thousands of students, and under constant review to initiate improvement. Nevertheless, there are significant gaps in the data currently available. Many students are unable to access the limited number of available seats, particularly in the universities. But reliable information on the extent of this problem is not yet accessible. The effectiveness of the system of post-secondary education depends upon many factors – adequate funding, careful planning and col-

2 The Link File was an attempt to utilize several specific characters to identify individual students and consequently monitor their progress through the post-secondary system. Due to a number of difficulties in transcription, there was some concern about the validity of the results.

laboration among institutions to provide the best of opportunities with the resources available. In several respects the Council is constituted to provide leadership in influencing policies relevant to admissions and transfer. The evidence garnered in this report indicated that, while many questions remain unanswered, it is within Council's mandate to address these while at the same time having an impact on future public policy.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is: (a) to review the research reports and related projects commissioned and conducted by the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer, particularly those completed in the last ten years; (b) to summarize and integrate the results of these projects and reports; and (c) to provide a critical analysis of the implications of those findings for the development of public policy with respect to the admission and transfer of students within post-secondary institutions in British Columbia.

While the Council's stated mandate is fairly specific, it is important to recognize that transfer policy is conducted in the broader context of the overall management of post-secondary education. Some reference to that context is critical to understanding how transfer and admission policies have evolved. The background from which policy is derived has several components. One is the historical development of post-secondary education since 1960 and the evolution of policy respecting transfer. A second component is understanding the balance between the role of the state and the independence of individual institutions in the formulation of policy. A third factor is the part played by a quasi independent agency of government, such as the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer, in effecting change in policy and practice through consultation and cooperation, in lieu of regulation. Consequently, references to all these components are interspersed through this report, to inform the reader of contextual factors supplementing the research findings.

Significantly, while research studies provide basic data respecting admissions and transfer, underlying explanations for certain phenomena are not captured in the research results. Discussions of these results with the authors of these reports provided the writer with supplemental information, which enriched the analysis. This information is also integrated into this report.

Reference should be made to whom this report is addressed. While specifically directed to the members of Council, it is anticipated that a much wider readership will result. Many of the comments and recommendations, while of direct concern to Council, are relevant to institutions, government, and students of higher education. Much of the comment will inevitably stimulate debate beyond the confines of Council and should be read in that light. Any debate which leads to a better appreciation of admission and transfer issues in the province is to be encouraged.

Finally, it should be noted that Appendix A includes a numerical listing of research and related projects commissioned by Council over the past decade. When the results of these projects are referred to in the text, they are referenced by the appropriate numbers in Appendix A.

The Concept of Transfer With Credit

Most participants in the higher education enterprise in British Columbia today assume that students, suitably qualified, may transfer between institutions with the assurance that academic credits accumulated previously will be honoured after transfer. There are certain caveats in this process, most of which are formally recorded and generally understood by all involved, except apparently by a small percentage of the students (Andres, 1997). These caveats include requirements that transferees attain a certain academic standing and that the course and/or programs for which credit is sought are designated on a public record prepared for the purpose.

Many involved in post-secondary education do not appreciate that the policy and practice of transfer, while not unique to this province,[3] is not the case in most Canadian jurisdictions, and is often viewed with a certain degree of incredulity by observers elsewhere. In particular, universities in Canada, for whom autonomy in academic matters is paramount, are highly selective about those they admit and even more scrupulous regarding the awarding of advanced credit to those admitted.

The organization and management of higher education in British Columbia, while falling well short of a "system" model, is arguably among the most advanced in Canada, although some may argue that Quebec has the most structured system. It is instructive to review briefly how transfer policy was formulated.

Prior to 1962, the University of BC, with its satellite campus in Victoria, was the sole representative of public higher education in the province. Student transfer was not an issue. By the late 1950s public pressure to expand post-compulsory educational opportunity, particularly in non-urban regions, was mounting. The president of UBC, Norman MacKenzie, responded to public debate on the issue by suggesting that satellite campuses to UBC be established in selected rural population centres.[4] Had this policy been adopted, transfer of credit would have been a "fait accompli" under one nexus of control. The Macdonald report of 1962, however, chaired by MacKenzie's successor, culminated in an almost complete reversal of public policy respecting the structure of public higher education.

Macdonald (*Higher Education in British Columbia*, 1962), drawing heavily on models in states such as California and Michigan, recommended that the proposed alternatives to universities and four year colleges[5] be regional colleges, managed by autonomous boards, and offering a comprehensive curriculum, including the comment that "provisions must be made in two-year colleges for those students who want to transfer to a four-year college or university later on." To ensure this objective, academic courses in colleges would of necessity be "**parallel**, but not **identical**," to those in the universities.

3 Alberta has a comparable, but not identical, transfer policy.

4 In 1958 the School Board in Kelowna commissioned a study of the feasibility of establishing a college based upon the affiliation principle.

5 Macdonald recommended that four year colleges, rather than universities, be established in Victoria and the Lower Mainland.

The foregoing expectation, however, was predicated on the acceptance of such courses by the essentially autonomous universities. This somewhat dramatic new policy would be unlikely to occur without extended debate and Macdonald, clearly sensitive to the issue, took care to address the need to ensure academic credibility in the proposed colleges. In pursuit of this goal, his report recommended the creation of an Academic Board which would "guarantee the standards of new institutions," as well as the existing universities. Further, the Academic Board would effectively become "an accrediting agency" whose imprimatur would be necessary to qualify an institution for "further financial support."

While several aspects of the report were ignored, much of Macdonald's advice was translated into action by the government of the day, particularly through legislation to allow for the establishment of an alternative post-secondary model. An Academic Board was created in 1964, and the Minister wisely chose the former Dean of Arts at UBC, Sperrin Chant, to serve as Chair. Chant, drawing upon his considerable prestige and influence, certainly within the university community, immediately took action to ensure the credibility of the new colleges and was able to convince the universities that a policy of credit transfer, carefully implemented and managed, would be an acceptable innovation.

One action taken by the Academic Board was to sponsor a symposium, attended by senior academics and administrators from the universities and colleges, which focussed upon the topic of "college – university articulation" (Academic Board, 1962). Inter alia, speakers shared what data were then available on the performance of transfer students and the reasons why some were not admissible to the university. One other key aspect of the symposium was to establish "subject group" meetings (the forerunner to the current articulation committees) which discussed academic issues unique to each discipline.

In the next two decades the essential role of the Academic Board was carried on by a series of organizational models. The initial legislation pertaining to the college sector, The College and Institute Act of 1977, provided for an Academic Council which, after its demise in the early 1980s, was replaced by the BC Post-Secondary Coordinating Committee, also with institutional representation. As the number of colleges increased, the predominance of university representatives on these bodies was reduced, and the voice of the college sector was heard more often.

In general terms the practice of transfer was conducted without major problems between 1968 and 1988, although transfer difficulties were cited as a factor in student demonstrations at Simon Fraser University in 1968 and 1969. The universities maintained their autonomy respecting admission of students and each published a compendium of course and program information which clarified equivalency and credit value for courses developed in the colleges. The colleges, cognizant of the need to design courses with university equivalency in mind, responded conscientiously, although not always happily. Parity of esteem – the ideal goal in a diverse galaxy of post secondary institutions – was well short of realization.

Part of the reason for the foregoing may be found in the unequal institutional autonomy as represented in legislation. For example, the University Act makes little reference to the powers of the Minister, except for 48 (2), which requires ministerial authority before a university may establish a new degree program. In fact, the Act makes specific reference to areas in which the Minister **may not** interfere, including with the right of the university to establish "standards for admission and gradua-

tion." Conversely, the College and Institute Act devotes a full section to the powers, both prescribed and discretionary, assigned to the Minister. In particular, the Minister may **require** colleges to "establish articulation committees" and **require** the colleges to participate in such committees. All in all, the universities hold the political cards and the colleges shun conformity at their peril.

In 1988, the government established a provincial access committee (Report 1988) for the purpose of reviewing many of the perceived deficiencies in the post-secondary system, particularly with reference to access, capacity, and fiscal and institutional barriers to wider participation in advanced education. In one section, the final report noted that, while transfer of credit works "reasonably well," improvements were both possible and desirable. Accordingly, it was recommended that a Coordinating Council on Admissions, Transfer and Articulation be established to address current and future difficulties in these areas. In response, the Minister established the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer.

In the last decade much has been accomplished. Under its first Executive Director, Dr. Grant Fisher, the Council took several actions to formalize transfer policy and practice. The individual transfer "guides" produced by each of three universities were consolidated into a single *BC Transfer Guide*, while reports pertaining to the flow of students in the system, their performance and persistence, and their graduation rates were generated. Further, principles and guidelines for transfer policy were reaffirmed and approved by each institution. In effect, transfer policy became more transparent.

Further activities by Council continued under its second director, Dr. Frank Gelin, who, in conjunction with his associate director, Finola Finlay, initiated action in several regards. The mechanisms by which institutions formally request transfer credit were streamlined; an online transfer guide was developed; articulation committees were expected to operate under more formalized and accountable procedures; an extensive research plan was implemented to measure the effectiveness of the current transfer credit system; administrative polices and practices respecting transfer in all institutions were reviewed and recommended changes made; alternatives to current practice in transfer were examined and institutions and articulation committees were encouraged to develop innovative transfer arrangements for their disciplines or programs; the content and management of associate degrees were revisited; and considerable effort was made to provide better and more useful information to students to assist them with the transfer process.

At the same time, as the Council was expanding its role and influence in affairs consistent with its mandate, other important developments in post secondary education in the province were taking place in response to the recommendations in the Access Report. Four (later five) colleges were granted authority to award a number of academic and applied degrees; the BC Institute of Technology and Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design were also given degree granting status; and the University of Northern British Columbia was opened. In one decade the number of institutions with authority to award degrees grew from four to fourteen. In addition, several institutions sponsored degrees under collaborative arrangements with the BC Open University. **Figure 1** demonstrates the diversity and complexity of higher education in British Columbia. With so many institutions serving as both "sending" and "receiving" with respect to student mobility, management of the admissions and transfer process has become more complex.

Figure 1:
British Columbia Public* Post-Secondary Institutions, 1999-2000

Of the 28 public post-secondary education institutions in B.C., 14 (in italics) are degree granting. The 8 colleges which offer collaborative degrees** are highlighted in grey.

REGION	UNIVERSITIES	UNIVERSITY COLLEGES	COLLEGES	INSTITUTES
LOWER MAINLAND				
	B.C. Open University	*Univ. College of the Fraser Valley*	Capilano College	*B.C. Institute of Technology*
	Simon Fraser University	*Kwantlen University College*	Douglas College	*Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design*
	Technical University of B.C.		Langara College	Institute of Indigenous Gov't
	University of B.C.		Vancouver Community College	Justice Institute
				Open Learning Agency (BC Open University, Open College and Knowledge Network)
VANCOUVER ISLAND				
	Royal Roads University	*Malaspina University-College*	Camosun College	
	University of Victoria		North Island College	
REST OF B.C.				
	University of Northern B.C.	*Okanagan University College*	College of New Caledonia	Nicola Valley Institute of Technology
		University College of the Cariboo	College of the Rockies	
			Northern Lights College	
			Northwest Community College	
			Selkirk College	
TOTAL per Category	7	5	11	5***

* Trinity Western University, Columbia College, Coquitlam College and Yukon College are also part of the transfer system.
** Collaborative degrees involve courses offered at the college campus leading to a degree offered by another BC public institution. The colleges are extensively involved in the development and delivery of curriculum.
*** The Open Learning Agency is listed as one institution, of which the BC Open University, Open College and Knowledge Network form a part.

Council priorities since 1996 were influenced partially by the production of a government strategic plan for the future of the colleges and institutes (Charting a New Course, 1996). Somewhat optimistically the plan noted that "block transfer arrangements will be developed to allow transfer of credit between institutions and eliminate the time-consuming process of course-by-course institutional credit assessment." The notion of block transfer, which holds different meanings for different individuals, has been under careful review by Council. A number of innovative projects are currently underway to facilitate block transfer in specific disciplines.[6]

Another major accomplishment by Council since its inception has been the commissioning of a wide range of research studies and projects (see Appendix A) which, in addition to providing a plethora of data on student mobility and performance, have addressed a number of obstacles, perceived and real, to effective transfer. Many of these studies and reports, either implicitly or explicitly, provide implications for public policy on the issues of admission and transfer. The remainder of this paper is devoted to a detailed examination of what has been learned and how the results may be applied. Before doing so, however, reference should be made to one other important factor in determining public policy, i.e., the part played by the state.

6 Following the publication of the Strategic Plan, Council passed the following motion:
"In light of the Council's research on block transfer in BC and other jurisdictions, and in light of the responses, comments and recommendations received on this topic from the post-secondary system, the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer believes that our current system is working well but can be enhanced, and therefore supports and encourages the development and promotion of block transfer arrangements for arts and science programs and courses."

The Role of The State in Higher Education[7]

Goedegebuure, Kaiser, Maassen and De Weert (1993) conceptualize two forms of influence or behaviour respecting the role of the state in managing or directing the higher education enterprise – the interventionary or the facilitatory state. In the former, government is actively involved in institutional actions, designed to ensure results such as economic efficiency, student access and accountability. Thus, consistent with the priorities of the state reflected in economic and/or social policy, its actions are designed to ensure that public institutions of higher education perform as instruments of such policy. Modern states are committed to expanding existing modes of production, increasing international competitiveness, and supporting training of citizens in areas that are essential to sustain economic productivity. Rarely does the modern state focus upon the social consequences of its economic goals, i.e., the promotion of social class relationships which emphasize the gap between capital and labour. Nor does the concept of an "educated and informed citizenry" or the non-economic values of human capital, so popular in the 1960s, enter the lexicon of contemporary government communiqués.

On the other hand, the facilitatory state regards institutions of higher education as quasi-independent instruments of policies and actions ultimately beneficial to the pursuit of a modern democratic and productive society. Legislation enacted by this state is essentially permissive, actions respecting higher education policy usually follows participatory debate, and responsibility for institutional policies is decentralized through the creation of cooperative governing structures.

Actions taken by the government of British Columbia in the past three decades, although somewhat reflective of differing political persuasions, have generally demonstrated both forms of state involvement. There has been a growing emphasis upon economic goals – a focus upon employability skills, workplace training designed to meet the needs of business and industry, training for international competitiveness, higher productivity in program delivery, and instructional management and retraining as a result of community economic restructuring.

At the same time, recent legislation respecting governance of colleges and the awarding of baccalaureate degree-granting status tends to emphasize the more academic aspects of institutions, giving an expanded role "for academic education and its traditions, such as collegiality." Further, government actions are permissive respecting the development of collaborative degrees, which allow for joint planning of programs between individual institutions. At the present time, for example, the BC Open University is party to approximately 22 such degrees, most within the province of British Columbia.

It is also worth noting that government has, occasionally, taken direct action respecting the management of the post-secondary system. These actions include: the "melding" of vocational schools and community colleges; the separation of Douglas College into two institutions; a similar separation of Vancouver Community College; the designation of degree-granting status to five colleges and other

7 From Levin, J.S. "The Refashioned Institution: the Community College in the Age of Globalization." Book manuscript. Tucson, AZ. Center for the Study of Higher Education, U of Arizona, 2000.

institutes; and ensuring the participation of the established universities in the academic development of the university colleges.

Nevertheless, attempts to advance the collaborative relationships between public institutions in the province have rested upon the willingness of each individual college or university to cooperate in the process. Academic autonomy is guarded conscientiously and the specific interests of each institution continue to prevail. Collaboration is driven by "moral suasion." Government action is often critical, but rarely intrusive into matters of academic autonomy which is usually the basis of institutional cooperation.

In this context it is important to restate the mandate of the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer, which as an intermediary agency, is able to act as an appropriate suasive body in a voluntary and collaborative system of independent institutions in British Columbia.

Transfer Student Flow:[8] A Rationing Of Places

This report includes an examination of the patterns of transfer student flow from colleges to the three largest universities during the period 1990 to 1999 (1-7), supplemented by interviews conducted with selected individuals in the three universities who were responsible for monitoring the flow of transfer students. Several factors were found to contribute to the phenomenon of access respecting transfer students. (Appendices B, C, and D provide diagrammatic information on the flow of transfer students).

Table 1 summarizes the number of college transfer students entering the three largest universities in the years 1990 to 1999. In addition, transfer student admissions is shown as a percentage of all undergraduate students entering each university for the first time. It is apparent that, while fluctuations occur in any given period, there has been a stabilizing, or in some respects a diminishing trend in the flow of college transfers. For example, in 1994, transfer students to Simon Fraser constituted 41% of the entering cohort. By 1998 these students represented only 27% of this cohort. At the University of Victoria, the number of transfers reached 1510 in 1995. Since that year a small but steady reduction in the number of transfers culminated in the admission of approximately 1100 in 1999. At the University of British Columbia the pattern is somewhat different, showing a small but steady rise in the number of transfers during the past decade, although the overall percentage intake is consistently lower than either SFU or UVic.

In the last decade the number of places in degree programs within the system of higher education in B.C. has been carefully rationed and is becoming increasingly so. Allocation is based upon several factors, primarily financial. Funding is in large part driven by the number of full time equivalent (FTE) students. In effect, the government "purchases" more seats by increasing operating grants, and universities are expected to respond by adding to quotas in degree programs. In the planning process universities set senate-approved quotas in high demand programs, both for grade 12 graduates in first year, and for transfer students in second and third years. The effective grade point average (GPA) for admission at any level is driven by the quality of applicants filling the quota. Although the published minimum grade point average for application by college transfers is 2.0, the actual minimum for admission may range between 2.5 and 3.0 depending upon when the quota is filled.

It is instructive to review in more detail the fluctuations in grade point average which constitute the "cut off" point for students wishing to transfer to universities. **Table 2** displays admission standards at UBC from 1994 to 1999. After a relatively high minimum GPA in 1994-95, the levels remained constant until 1999-00 when a dramatic rise occurred. While the published minimum in that year remains at 2.0, the actual minimums for 2nd and 3rd year Arts were 2.7 and 2.8 respectively and 2.6 for year 2 in Science. **Table 3** shows a similar pattern for SFU where there has been a steady increase in minimum GPA in the last five years. At the University of Victoria the "cut-off" for admission of

8 Universities define a transfer student as one who has completed one year of full time equivalent study at college prior to transfer (full-time equivalent is defined differently among the universities). Hence, these data do not include students who have completed less than one year of study at a college.

transfer students has also risen at the rate of approximately one percentage point per year. In 1999 the actual minimum was 73% although the published minimum remained at 60%.

TABLE 1:
Numbers and Percentages of Students Transferring to the Three Largest Universities[9]

Year	University of B.C.		Simon Fraser University		University of Victoria		Grand Total
	Number	% Total Admissions	Number	% Total Admissions	Number	% Total Admissions	
1990	1267	19	1850	35	989	27	4106
1991	1191	17	1592	36	939	29	3722
1992	1073	17	1515	36	1141	30	3729
1993	1281	19	1949	39	1134	31	4364
1994	1192	18	2355	41	1329	30	4876
1995	1235	18	1631	34	1510	28	4376
1996	1536	20	1685	34	1372	27	4593
1997	1544	20	1611	32	1392	29	4547
1998	1646	21	1281	27	1288	29	4215
1999	1665	21	1492	31	*1098	*27	4773

* These are preliminary figures only.

TABLE 2:
College Transfer to UBC – GPA for Admission

	FINAL GPA – FACULTY OF ARTS		FINAL GPA – FACULTY OF SCIENCE	
Year	Year 2	Year 3	Year 2	Year 3
1994	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.0
1995	2.3	2.0	2.4	2.0
1996	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
1997	2.2	2.0	2.2	2.0
1998	2.3	2.0	2.4	2.0
1999	2.7	2.8	2.6	2.0

9 Total admissions include all first time entrants, which consist of those entering directly from high school as well as those who first attended other post-secondary institutions, including public colleges.

TABLE 3:
College Transfer to SFU – GPA for Admission

YEAR	ADMISSION GPA
1994	2.5
1995	2.5
1996	2.4
1997	2.7
1998	*2.8

Note: Transfer students are admitted to SFU in any of three semesters.
The GPA reported is from Semester 3 when the majority of students transfer.
* While the GPA was 2.8, the mean GPA of admitted students was 3.02.

It is apparent that several factors are at play which are placing increasing pressure upon access to degree programs in the provincial post-secondary system:

- a recognition by young people and their parents that a post-secondary education is becoming an essential requirement for a "good" job and a more secure future (in particular, as jobs for high school graduates in the resource sector diminish, more well paid positions in the technology sector require post-secondary education);

- as a consequence secondary school retention rates to graduation have increased and proportionally more students are seeking admission to post high school programs (this is compounded by an overall increase in the number of high school students in the province);

- as demand increases, the minimum GPA required for admission to the universities escalates while the universities maintain strict controls over the number of places available. As a result, "good average" high school graduates with GPAs of 2.0 – 2.8 are unable to gain direct admission to the university of their choice;

- these "good average" students then enter college transfer programs with the intention of enrolling in university after one or two years. As the GPA required for high school graduates increases so, in turn, does the minimum GPA required of transfer students to access university degree programs. The inevitable result is that many more students find themselves unable to qualify for transfer. Ultimately a "traffic jam" in the flow of students within the system has occurred; and

- the situation is further complicated by the fact that attrition rates in first year university programs have diminished as the GPA required for admission has increased. As universities are required to accommodate "their own" students, the number of places for transfer students is under greater pressure, in spite of their dependence upon set quotas.

With current data the Council is able to track the number of students who enrol in the universities, either as transfers or direct entries. What is unknown, however, is the number of students who, while qualified academically, are unsuccessful in meeting the cutoff level of achievement set by the quotas and hence denied admission. In the absence of data on those students who fail to continue their programs in the post-secondary system, it is not possible to fully assess the extent to which the current arrangements are meeting the needs of its potential population.

It is also important to note that current data respecting transfer students are confined to those entering the three largest universities. At the time of writing there is no information available regarding transfer to the University of Northern British Columbia, the university colleges, Royal Roads or the BC Open University. However, efforts to correct these deficiencies are in progress.

Questions of Quality: The Performance of Transfer Students

A plethora of "follow-up" studies on the performance of college students after transfer has been conducted over the past 30 years, beginning as early as 1966 when the first cohort of students, 146 in number, transferred from Vancouver City College to the University of British Columbia. From this and from a series of studies conducted in the 1970s a familiar pattern began to emerge. Students who garnered two years of credit at college prior to transfer performed better than those with fewer credits; achievement varied considerably depending upon the faculty entered; transfer students displayed an initial drop in academic standing, followed by a gradual rise; graduation rates for transfer students were comparable to those of direct entry students.

During the 1980s as the system matured and the number of institutions increased, transfer patterns became more complex. To better understand this phenomenon the Council on Admissions and Transfer commissioned three universities to conduct detailed profile analyses of the flow and performance of transfer students (1-7).

As part of its role in guiding policy in higher education, the Council's research and public policy objective may be expressed as follows:

"If it can be shown that students who first attend a college are able to transfer without difficulty and subsequently perform well in their academic studies, then:

- the public will retain confidence in the community college system,
- the degree granting institutions will readily accept community college students, and
- the entire system of post-secondary education can work in a more coordinated fashion to improve access for students in a cost effective manner." (Gelin, 1998)

With regard to the assessment of student performance after transfer, a considerable amount of information has been generated by the universities in their capacity as "receiving" institutions. However, there are critical caveats, which must preface any conclusions with the phrase "in general terms." Consistent with their autonomous status in matters of academic management, the three major universities employ different standards in student selection, utilize quite different grading practices and use different bases for rationing seats in competitive programs. One example is the approach to applicants with an Associate Degree (AD). Simon Fraser University offers preferential enrolment to AD holders and admits them with a GPA of 2.0 while requiring a GPA of 2.75 to 3.0 for regular transfer students.

Hence, in general terms, the following conclusions may be drawn respecting the performance of transfer students to these universities.

- Practice respecting the average admission percentages for college transfer is deceptive. In 1997, the mean admission average for transfer students at UBC was 73%, equivalent to a GPA of approximately 2.80. However, the published minimum for admission was 60% or a GPA of 2.00.

Similarly, at UVic, while the published minimum for admission in 1997 was 60%, the actual mean average of those admitted was 73%. SFU, on the other hand, has consistently raised the actual minimum GPA for admission from 2.40 in 1994 to 2.80 – 3.00 in 1998. It is evident that requirements for entry from college are rising and students in college programs may well be disillusioned when their expectations respecting transfer are confronted by reality. It should be noted that, in this context, universities are "supply driven" and hence admission standards are set by space availability rather than by arbitrary raising of admission requirements.

- Within the category of part time attendance the participation of transfer students at the three universities varies. At UBC, SFU and UVic the proportions of transfer students enrolled part time are, respectively, 24%, 69% and 50%. Part of the explanation is in the more liberal policy of part time attendance as practiced at Simon Fraser. Another reason for part-time attendance, both at college and university, is the inability of students to register for courses which are filled to capacity. Although the answer is not known, it may be hypothesized that transfer students, many of whom were part time attendees at college, continue this pattern because of academic and/or financial considerations. In contrast, by far the majority of direct entry students attend on a full time basis. Any extent to which part time attendance is related to higher achievement or otherwise remains unknown.

- The pattern of "transfer shock" as evidenced by the decline in academic standing by students in their initial session after transfer appears to be consistent at all universities. Despite the difficulty of establishing equivalency in different university grading systems, the general pattern of performance is that transfer students experience a considerable increase in grade point between their first post transfer session and their final graduating GPA. SFU and UVic provide additional data, which indicate that the graduating GPA of college transfers is lower but comparable with that of direct Grade 12 entrants.

- The issue of "transfer shock" is itself problematic. Pascarella (1999) addresses this topic from a U.S. perspective and concludes that "problems in adjusting to the academic demands and unfamiliar social milieu of the university serve to compound the impact of transfer barriers." Nor is this phenomenon restricted to transfer students. The SFU study indicates that direct high school entrants with an average GPA of 3.35 (on a four-point scale) recorded an average GPA of 2.47 after their first semester at the university. Similarly the mean performance of this cohort increased over time culminating in a mean GPA at graduation of 3.00 (compared to a 2.91 for transfer students.)

- Reports generated by the three largest universities provide a detailed account of the performance of students after transfer as they progress towards graduation. While the wide variation in cohort numbers precludes analysis by statistical differences, general patterns emerge. College transfers from outside the lower mainland, while fewer in numbers, tend to perform better than those from the Vancouver area. This observation is not surprising given the commitment, financial and otherwise, required of students moving from the interior to the urban universities. While students at some colleges tend to perform better than others, the overall performances of transfer students is sufficient to justify public confidence in the quality of preparation of such students. The real value in these figures is for each individual institution to carefully examine the performance of its transfer students, relative to others, and consider what action, if any, is necessary.

Measures of transfer student performance are also to be found in the detailed results in individual courses, which each university provides. With few exceptions direct entry students, most having been on campus for one year or more, outperform transfer students when measured by "mean" grades. Again, the real value in reporting these results is the subsequent scrutiny by departmental personnel and individual instructors in the various disciplines in each college.

The comparative performance of transfer students invites a number of hypotheses by which to analyze results. In 1990, a Council study based upon the Link File reported that:

- of the high school graduates since 1986 who have transferred to university, 45% were originally ineligible for direct admission;
- after accounting for high school GPA there is no significant difference in the second year GPAs of direct entry students compared to college transfer students; and
- once students enter university, persistence and graduation rates are the same for direct entry and for transfer students.

While recent comment by Council has focussed on the hypothesis that controlling for high school grades will provide a more fair and equitable comparison of direct entry and transfer student performance, this hypothesis is untested in recent studies. Nevertheless, it is known that transfer students, compared to high school graduates, are often older, more heterogeneous in terms of background, usually some years out of secondary school, many with less than formal high school completion, and often with limited confidence as a result of unhappy educational experiences.

It seems reasonable to argue that to find success in college, accomplish the process of transfer to a complex university environment, and eventually proceed to graduation with a baccalaureate degree, all often accomplished while working part time, is evidence of sound preparation in college, an encouraging measure of individual determination, and a positive reflection upon a public system which provides the opportunity to express such commitment.

Implications for Public Policy

The issue of access and flow, while directly related to the capacity of the system to accommodate students, is a political as well as a financial problem. In the political arena governments are constantly under pressure to provide opportunities for students to pursue their educational goals. In response, they make well-published efforts to provide more seats and to open new avenues to degree programs. Typical of the latter strategy have been the BC Open University and College, the establishment of five university colleges, and the initiatives taken to offer a new category of baccalaureate degrees, usually referred to as "applied" degrees. All of these actions were taken to relieve the pressure on the universities and to provide additional places in degree programs. While a good deal of optimism has been applied to these initiatives, there are limited data available which can document their success or otherwise. To be effective public policy requires verification. To this date research commissioned by the Council on Admissions and Transfer has focussed almost entirely upon the three "traditional" universities. If an accurate measure to guide public policy is to be obtained, it will be necessary to gather appropriate data from the BC Open University, the university colleges, degree granting institutes and the University of Northern British Columbia. As noted earlier, action in this regard is currently underway.

As it is clearly evident that access to university level programs is directly related to the number of funded seats available and that a fair and equitable rationing of seats is essential, there are a number of possible actions which might be taken.

Whether government is prepared to fund more places in degree programs is a political and fiscal decision beyond the purview of Council. Hence no further comment is offered. However there are other initiatives which Council may address.

Given the need to ration the available pool of seats, it is clear that planning is essential to ensure that allocation is rational and equitable. Currently the universities engage in a limited planning process that does not include the university colleges, BC Open University or degree granting institutes. Nor does the process include the two year colleges whose own planning must take into account the number of potential seats available for those students intending to transfer. In the interest of establishing a transparent and widely published public policy, the system as a whole should be involved. The issue is that, if the concept of transfer and mobility of students is to be honoured, all institutions must accept responsibility for ensuring that it occurs with reasonable equity.

Commitment to the transfer process will, necessarily, be voluntary. The essential element in the higher education enterprise in British Columbia, indeed in Canada, is the preservation of institutional autonomy in matters of students admissions, promotion and assessment of performance. This level of autonomy, legislation notwithstanding, is applicable to all post-secondary institutions, and is widely regarded as an essential ingredient in the maintenance of quality. At the same time the interest of students must be respected, and this includes their expectation that transfer within the system can occur without unnecessary obstacles and with the recognition of appropriate credits. Transfer as an educational policy has long been adopted in the province.

An appropriate balance between institutional autonomy and student interest can be attained through voluntary participation in planning and implementation of policies that contribute to effective transfer. The Council on Admissions and Transfer, through its various committees, can play an effective catalyst role in this process. However, as yet Council has not played a major part in the admissions aspect of its mandate. As noted earlier, system-wide planning in admission policy is deemed to be necessary and the Council should consider how it may contribute to the initiative.

Partly due to its setting of priorities, and partly because of limited resources, virtually all of the studies commissioned by the Council to this date have involved the movement of students from colleges to three universities. At the same time it has been accepted and confirmed by earlier studies utilizing the Link File that transfer takes place in many directions and through many arrangements. Given the complexity of the system, particularly the increase in the number of degree-granting institutions, compounded by the limitation on places available, it seems essential that a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of transfer patterns should be obtained.

To this end several examples of as yet unexamined practices within the system include: the extent of the BC Open University's contribution to transfer students in a receiving and sending capacity; a similar understanding of the roles of the university colleges in this process; the effects of the growth of applied degrees at BCIT, Emily Carr and the university colleges in expanding access to degree programs; the contribution of Royal Roads University, the Technical University of BC and the University of Northern British Columbia to the transfer enterprise; and the apparent movement of university graduates to technical programs as evidence of "reverse transfer." In each of these cases data on numbers and the subsequent performance of students are necessary to understand how the system is responding to issues of supply and demand in response to the public policy agenda.

It must be acknowledged that the fulfillment of these changes is currently beyond the financial resources of the Council but, even given the current budget, it might be necessary to reorder its research priorities in different years to enhance its understanding of the admissions and transfer enterprise in the province.

Alternative Policy Options

In the process of preparing this report, a number of more radical approaches to the admissions and transfer process were mooted in discussions with interviewees. It was noted that several jurisdictions, primarily in the United States, had involved government intervention through the legislative process to ensure more effective policies and procedures. Such action in British Columbia is universally regarded as undesirable and unacceptable. The Council has long maintained its opposition to this option, as it believes that building a system of effective transfer on voluntary institutional commitment to fair and equitable access for transfer students will be more effective in the long term than would result from compliance required by formal legislation.

Other options, more or less radical, were advanced. One arrangement, although not new, continues to attract attention. This option requires the universities to surrender the first and perhaps second years of undergraduate studies to the colleges. This model would allow the universities to concentrate upon the senior years of specialized programs without the requirement to maintain large classes in courses regarded as part of general education. The colleges would then bear the responsibility for instruction in the initial years of post-secondary studies by providing a less intimidating environment for learning. Successful students with post-secondary experience would then transfer into more advanced years of study at the universities. A model similar to this has been utilized in Quebec since the late sixties.

A second model would be somewhat an antithesis of the foregoing. It would involve the elimination of transfer as a policy in that all undergraduate studies in academic programs would be conducted in universities (and presumably university colleges.) Colleges would then focus their efforts upon technological, technical and applied programs. An organizational model such as this is common in many other provinces, particularly Ontario. Nevertheless, a certain amount of transfer, usually in applied areas, does occur in these jurisdictions. Transfer Guides, similar to the BC and Alberta models, have been produced in New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Manitoba, and Ontario.

Given the history and development of post-secondary education in this province, neither of the aforementioned models is probable. They are merely reported as examples of how transfer and admissions policy in a complex system of higher education might be managed. The Council on Admissions and Transfer has had no serious discussion of either option and holds no view on their desirability.

Obstacles to Transfer: Perceived and Real

Despite publication of the *BC Transfer Guide*, which provides a consistently updated list of courses and programs deemed to be equivalent, there is evidence that students do encounter a number of obstacles to the awarding of full credits on transfer from college to university. A number of reports, specifically by Andres (11-14, 16) and the province-wide Student Outcomes Survey (15) indicated that some students identify a number of difficulties in the transfer process. The Andres study involved a small sample of students transferring from Douglas College to Simon Fraser University. The Student Outcomes Survey (1996) included responses from 7756 province-wide students who attempted to transfer credits, of whom 1233 or 16% reported some type of problem in the process. In both studies the difficulties were similar, i.e., one or more courses not accepted, or "articulation problems" which seemed to suggest misunderstanding regarding reported credit equivalency, delays in acceptance attributed to transcript delays, etc. The general impression gleaned from these data was that student expectations, based upon erroneous assumptions or garnered advice, were occasionally compounded by bureaucratic difficulties.

Problems were reported by only a small minority of those transferring while an impressive majority of students found the transfer process to be smooth and uncomplicated. While the 1997 Student Outcomes Survey again reported approximately 15% of respondents experiencing transfer problems, 55% felt **very well prepared** for further study.

Given that the foregoing is based upon the student perception of the transfer process, the Council initiated a series of studies (8-10), which provided an institutional perspective by analyzing a selected sample of the transcripts of students applying for transfer credit. To this date studies have been conducted by the University of British Columbia, the University of Victoria, and Simon Fraser University. While some administrative procedures and definitions differ in these three universities, there is a high degree of consistency in the results, summarized as follows:

- the vast majority (85 – 90%) of transcripted course credits were accepted;
- more credits were unsuccessfully transferred in Science than other disciplines;
- the primary reasons for unsuccessful transfer of credits were non-articulation with the respective receiving institution, credits transferred with a reduced credit value (largely in Science), credits earned in pre-college courses, such as Adult Basic Education, or credits accumulated in vocational technical courses; and
- students attempted to transfer with more than the maximum limit of sixty credits.

The Simon Fraser University report includes the observation that colleges are not exclusively academic in their program structures and that students attend for a variety of reasons often over an extended period of time. During that period students often change career goals and accumulate credits in a variety of disciplines.

The general conclusion that may be drawn from all of the foregoing is that transfer success is virtually assured when **published procedures** are followed and course equivalencies are **strictly adhered to**. However, difficulties arise when students do not seek or receive accurate advice when they change intended transfer destinations, either by institution or program. But it would be wrong

to absolve either sending or receiving institutions of certain responsibilities. Regular scrutiny of transfer course equivalencies is necessary to ensure accurate and current information. There is a need for specific personnel in every institution to "specialize" in transfer policy and practice to ensure that advice to students, in publications or other formats, is timely and correct. Further, as conforming to deadlines is crucial for application to admission to particular programs, submission of transcript and other information needs constant attention.

Based largely upon Andres' (1997) report on transfer experiences of students, the Council initiated the publication of *BC Transfer TIPS* (1999), which provides students with a detailed account of procedures and safeguards in order to ensure a more successful and less stressful transfer process. This document has been circulated widely and should be available to all students.

Another action taken by Council has been to initiate a Task Force on Standards and Processes (21). In its efforts to reduce administrative obstacles to smooth transfer, the Task Force recommended a common set of policies and procedures to be implemented at all institutions in the province. This initiative by Council has proven to be a particularly effective action in facilitating the transfer process.

The Associate Degree

Largely because no other agency was constituted to introduce the idea of an associate degree, the Council on Admissions and Transfer assumed this responsibility in the early 90s. After extensive discussion with college and university representatives, the criteria for curriculum and level of performance for associate degrees in Arts and in Sciences were approved. In the ensuing decade the AD has enjoyed mixed success in the college and institute sector, much depending upon the level of support given to it in each institution.

Apart from monitoring the numbers of AD programs and sponsoring several reviews (24-27), the Council has not commissioned research which might, for example, reveal why – or why not – students chose the AD credential or how successful AD graduates are in their subsequent studies. However, after careful review, the Council has recently proposed a number of changes to the Associate Degree.

At the request of Council, Simon Fraser University generated some interesting data on AD graduates in its profile report of December 1999. In the period 1994 – 1998, SFU admitted 237 AD graduates, indicating a steady increase in each year. The mean GPA of AD holders was 2.63 as compared to all transfers at 3.02. After the first semester, while the mean GPA of all transfer students had fallen to 2.52, the AD mean GPA was better maintained, having fallen to 2.38. As in the case of all transfer students, AD graduates showed a steady increase in GPA as their university studies continued, finally culminating in a graduating GPA of 2.84. It should be noted that only Simon Fraser and UNBC have a policy of granting special consideration in enrolment to AD graduates.

The lower GPA reported for AD graduates on admission to SFU is understandable when the stringent academic requirements for the degree are taken into account. It may well be that those requirements present a disincentive to potential students entering the AD program. However, this hypothesis remains untested.

If the Council is to maintain its responsibility for advancing the associate degree concept (and this assumption may merit debate) it seems logical that it commission a set of research projects involving the associate degree to determine, for example, how students view the AD as a program advantageous to their career interests. Given the mixed reception of the degree at the various institutions, it may well be necessary to review all polices applied to the degree, a process better taken in the light of valid data.

Significantly, in the initial stages of implementation, there was no expectation that the associate degree would form a basis for "block" transfer. The universities held deep reservations on that topic. However, in the current climate of debate the relationship between the associate degree and "block" transfer (which for the universities a more appropriate term would be "program" transfer) has been revisited. Hence some comment on block or program transfer of credit is indicated.

Block Transfer

Following the reference to block, as distinct from course-by-course transfer, in the strategic plan Charting a New Course, the Council sponsored wide -ranging debate around the topic (31-33). In a series of communications, the Associate Director documented the thinking of Council and numerous representatives of the post-secondary community on current changes in the meaning, structure, feasibility and desirability of block transfer. Currently, intensive discussions are underway with the universities and university colleges to clarify the status of the associate degree as an instrument to facilitate block transfer.

Clearly, a considerable range of opinion exists on all of these aspects, and any attempt at implementation would be controversial at best. The Council has proceeded with caution, given the realization that the universities, the university colleges, and the community colleges and institutes by no means share a common understanding of how a block transfer policy would affect their practices with respect to transfer.

Even the relationship between block transfer and the associate degree is problematic. For example, if the universities were to accept a package of sixty credits for full transfer in either Arts or Science, the issue of acceptance of individual courses within the package credited by institutions other than their own would inevitably arise. While program transfer presents far fewer problems in most applied programs such as Nursing, Forestry, Engineering or Commerce, Arts and Sciences continues to defy easy solutions.

The Council has sought to initiate reform in transfer policy under the aegis of the subject articulation committees. In theory, these committees form the best arena to manage change in curricula specific to disciplines. In reality, many articulation committees do not include representation from more senior levels of departments and even if this limitation could be overcome, it is highly unlikely that academic departments would uncritically adopt the recommendations of articulation committees. The notion of academic autonomy is deeply rooted in the independence of academic units to prescribe the requirements for graduation within each particular discipline. Nevertheless, there are many potential alternatives to the traditional concept of block transfer, and Council has initiated a number of projects which would offer greater flexibility to the transfer process. A number of articulation committees have begun funded projects which promise a variety of enhancements to transfer in the Arts and Sciences.

While the ability of Council to bring about change is constrained, it does serve as an "honest broker" in the academic community. As such, it continues to conduct and commission projects which, while outside the designation of research, generate a body of information that informs proposed changes, albeit incremental, which it judges to be desirable.

The University Colleges

Although the university college idea has been implemented since 1989, much of their contributions to transfer policy remains unknown. As noted earlier in this report studies commissioned by the Council which focus on "receiving" institutions in the transfer process have dealt almost exclusively with the three largest universities. As noted earlier, virtually nothing is known about the flow of transfer to UNBC, BCIT, BC Open University, Royal Roads, Emily Carr and the five university colleges, all of which constitute an important segment of the post-secondary system.

With regard to the university colleges, a number of expectations accompanied their creation. For example, it was assumed that many additional seats in degree programs would result and that students who in previous years were forced to relocate to complete their degrees would be able to remain in their communities. Further, the development of alternative degrees, i.e., in applied areas, would attract students who would be interested in more practical applications of knowledge. University colleges, by virtue of their new designations as degree-granting, would be "receiving" as well as "sending" institutions. Thus they might relieve some of the pressure upon the established universities to admit more transfer students.

Although many of these issues fall under the rubric of "admissions," and hence well within the mandate of Council, the latter has not given them attention as reflected in research projects. Again, in the interest of further understanding the entire transfer pattern and the flow of students within the BC system it seems necessary that Council initiate such research.

As indicated in **Table 4**, a summary of profile reports from the three universities provides some information on the transfer of students from the university colleges. The figures are inconclusive. There appears to be a slight but gradual decline in transfer students in most, but not all cases (excluding Kwantlen that does not offer traditional academic degrees.) One might ask whether a decline was predictable or otherwise. Conjecture might centre about whether these students would have transferred to universities irrespective of the degree opportunities provided at their own institutions. Are university colleges accommodating a new and different cohort of degree program students or are they students who would have pursued degrees through the transfer process anyway? Such questions are relevant to Council's interest but remain unanswered.

TABLE 4:
Transfers from University Colleges to Universities
1992-93 to 1997-98

TRANSFERS FROM:	TRANSFERS TO:	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	TOTAL
Okanagan	SFU	74	52	42	27	33	32	228
	UBC	99	93	88	75	62	95	417
	UVic	110	113	151	125	137	119	636
		283	258	281	227	232	246	1,281
Cariboo	SFU	46	35	34	28	29	22	172
	UBC	78	66	63	63	71	63	346
	UVic	49	54	64	66	58	65	291
		173	155	161	162	158	150	809
Fraser Valley	SFU	57	74	78	50	64	55	323
	UBC	23	49	39	27	54	40	192
	UVic	15	33	35	37	32	33	152
		95	156	152	114	150	128	667
Malaspina	SFU	33	29	50	37	34	26	133
	UBC	33	34	25	37	28	27	157
	UVic	166	161	130	146	111	158	714
		232	224	205	220	173	211	1,054
	Subtotal	783	793	799	723	713	735	3,811
Kwantlen	SFU	269	386	516	383	418	413	1,972
	UBC	107	153	155	155	219	237	789
	UVic	43	43	59	86	88	76	319
		419	582	720	624	725	726	3,080
	GRAND TOTAL:	1,202	1,375	1,529	1,347	1,438	1,461	6,891

Satellite Issues

There are a number of issues relating to admission and transfer that hold an indirect interest for Council and are tangentially related to its mandate.

Transfer Rates:

Much has been said about transfer rates from academic programs in colleges to degree programs in universities. As early as 1989 Council sponsored a study, based upon the Link File, which concluded that the provincial rate of transfer was in the vicinity of 30%, with individual colleges' rates ranging between 17% and 56%. This report noted that problems of definition respecting the numerator and denominator tended to confuse the calculations.

In November, 1999 the Executive Director prepared a detailed analysis of transfer rate policies, drawing upon selected published debates from other constituencies (28). This study also emphasized the confusion and the lack of consistency in calculating transfer rates, which leads to a lack of confidence in the results. Of more pertinent intent was the question of whether transfer rates should be used as an appropriate performance indicator.

Based upon several reports noted in this paper, transfer is affected by several factors, i.e., spaces available in receiving institutions, ease of access in urban vis-à-vis rural regions, and increasing levels of academic standing required for transfer. Council has not yet addressed the issue of transfer rates and so cannot assess its usefulness as a performance indicator.

Participation Rates:

Although it might be argued that the issue of provincial participation rates should be of general interest to Council, it has not been involved in any debate nor attempted to gather data on this question. Given the controversial interpretation of information from a number of sources, federal and provincial, Council involvement is not appropriate. The reintroduction of the Link File may well provide a more accurate contribution to this debate.

Private Sector:

With regard to the extensive private post-secondary sector in the province, Council has taken no specific initiatives. The preparation of a government sponsored report on articulation between the public colleges and institutes and the private sector did involve a Council representative. In addition, Council has discussed the impact of private institutions, but given the resources at its disposal it is not, at this time, in a position to assume further responsibility. With the continuing accreditation of private colleges, the issue of transfer is likely to become more pressing in the future.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to (a) review the research reports and related projects commissioned and conducted by the BC Council on Admission and Transfer, particularly those completed in the last decade; (b) to summarize and integrate the results; and (c) to provide a critical analysis of the implications of those findings for the development of public policy with respect to transfer and admissions in the province.

Having completed this task it may be concluded that these studies have generated an important and useful body of data which has informed public policy on issues of transfer and admission of students to and within the post-secondary education sector. Not all of these data have been used effectively in all institutions, however, particularly the information on performance of transfer students at the level of faculty, department and course. These data sustain the view that, while transfer students do perform well, there are obvious and important variations by college and by program entered. It is in the best interests of individual college program areas to review these data with care and to initiate action where indicated.

Ultimately, a number of conclusions may be drawn from this study as follows:

1. Students are able to transfer into university programs which have maintained quotas that continue to ensure reasonable access for transfer students. However, there is evidence that while the number of potential transfers increases, the minimum level of admission continues to rise, and an unknown number of reasonably well qualified students are being denied transfer. Information gathered in these projects indicated that a serious "crush" in admissions is imminent when the available seats are carefully rationed through budgetary allocations in the universities. At the same time universities are obligated to provide places for direct entry students after their initial year, thus adding to the pressures upon admission of transfer students.

2. In general, transfer students perform sufficiently well at universities to maintain public confidence in the current policy. While there are differences that indicate better performance by direct entry (high school) entrants, the differences are small and diminish over time. When consideration is given to the heterogeneity of transfer students, their previous academic records, the necessity for many to study on a part-time basis and the pressure to adjust to the environment of a complex and somewhat intimidating university, the accomplishments of transfer students are even more impressive.

3. Although data suggests that some students perceive that a number of obstacles to transfer exist, additional objective evidence indicates that the problems are few and, in most part, explainable. The *BC Transfer Guide* (35) provides a reliable and accurate picture of course and program equivalency. A few anomalies do exist and require correction. Students do make uninformed decisions regarding their transfer plans and, although there have been major initiatives taken by Council to provide better advice, not all students will necessarily respond. The *Transfer TIPS* publication (34) should help students in this regard. While certain bureaucratic deficiencies in the transfer process also exist, much has been done to correct these. Council has sponsored

meetings attended by representatives of Registrars' Offices which have resulted in more consistent applications of appropriate practices (21-22).

4. A combination of factors, i.e., increasing complexity of the post-secondary system, and the divergence of curriculum have increased the need for more flexible approaches to transfer. Council has taken several initiatives in this regard. In areas such as block transfer and the Associate Degree, progress has been steady but slow. Legitimate concerns raised by both sending and receiving institutions have constrained effective action, and Council has proceeded diplomatically and with caution. Institutional autonomy on academic matters is close to the heart of the BC system and must be acknowledged and respected. Nevertheless, voluntary and sensitive action by institutions in cooperative endeavors has characterized the continuing success of the admissions and transfer enterprise in the province. Council's catalytic leadership is, in large part, responsible.

5. Council has placed a priority on revitalizing the articulation committees whose role is critical in curriculum reform. A number of new approaches to transfer are under investigation by several of these committees. While the results of this exercise are yet to be realized progress to date is encouraging. At the same time the "power" of articulation committees to affect change remains problematic and ultimately final decisions will rest with the authority of academic units in the institutions.

Recommendations

The contribution of Council to the success of the admissions and transfer enterprise is clearly established, and further, it should undertake a number of initiatives that are considered to be essential to better inform public policy in this regard.

1. To date, virtually all of the research commissioned by Council has been concerned with one "linear" pathway, i.e. the progress of students from the community and university colleges to the three largest universities.[10] There is a pressing need to monitor transfer to all receiving institutions, particularly UNBC, BC Open University, BCIT, the university colleges and Royal Roads. Only with this information will the extent of "direct" transfer and mobility of students through the system be fully understood.

2. The Council's research to date has ignored other directions of transfer such as: universities to colleges and institutes; colleges to university colleges; and the BC Open University to other universities. Each of these transfer routes contributes to a picture of student mobility within the province. A related issue is the reinstatement of the Link File, an effective instrument for gathering these data. While the Link File is outside its direct purview the Council should lend its voice to an argument for renewal. Currently, there are efforts under the direction of the Centre for Education Information Standards and Services (CEISS) to establish a "data warehouse" in which students are identified by a number assigned at an early stage in their educational careers.

3. With regard to admissions issues, Council reports have documented the numbers of students who transfer successfully to university. What is not known is how many are actually able to enter the program of their choice, nor are there any data to indicate how many qualified applicants are denied admission to university (or to their preferred institution). In the light of recent increases in the minimum GPA for admission, it seems important to better understand the magnitude of access problems. A count of unsuccessful applicants would be revealing.

4. As explained earlier in this report there is limited information on the overall impact of the university colleges upon the transfer and admissions question. While the anticipated advantages of university college development are many, little specific information has been gathered. Research specific to this new component of the system would help address the issue.

5. Research studies so far have addressed the progress of students from academic programs in colleges to traditional academic degrees in the three largest universities. A study conducted by Council in 1989 (based upon the Link File) indicated that 8% of transferees came from career programs and 11% from undetermined or unclassified programs. Given the development of applied degrees in several institutions in the past ten years, it seems logical to determine how many students choose the transfer route from career to applied degree programs and how well

10 Studies of the transfer situation at the University of Northern British Columbia and the BC Open University are currently underway.

they perform. With the growth of the diverse system in recent years, transfer and admission policy should no longer be restricted to academic areas.

6. There is sufficient evidence in Council studies to indicate that transfer students who complete two years or 60 credits successfully at college perform particularly well at university when compared to those who transfer with fewer credits. In terms of degree completion, the number of credits earned at college is a positive factor. At UBC, for example, students with 55 or more entry credits have a graduation rate within four or five years of 87%. Those with fewer than 30 credits show a comparative rate of 58% (5).

   Further, there is a more practical reason for recommending that students complete two years before transfer. Admission pressures based on quota allocations are more relaxed at the third year level than at the second. As a result, the minimum "cut off" point for applicants is lower. An indirect advantage to students is the opportunity to earn an associate degree, which has potential implications for priority admission and block or program transfer.

   In view of the above, Council should publicize the advantage to students of earning the maximum relevant credits prior to transferring.

7. By far the most pressing problem raised in this study is the overall deficiency of seats in degree programs and the public policy implications which follow. Conceivably, the credibility of public higher education in the province will rest upon the assurance that qualified applicants will be able to find places in the program of their choice. Although outside the direct mandate of Council, overall planning to ensure fair and equitable transfer and admission policies in an environment where spaces are rationed is a critical task. Presently the universities do participate in a planning exercise but do not include the university colleges, other degree granting institutions, or the two year colleges and institutes. To better inform public policy from a system perspective, Council might encourage the development of a more inclusive and participatory planning process.

A Final Comment

Having completed an extensive review of the information regarding admission and transfer which has been garnered over the past decade, and having heard the views of many directly involved in managing the transfer process, the author feels compelled to record some personal reflections.

The post-secondary enterprise in this province is impressive in many respects. The number and diversity of institutions developed over the past thirty years provide a wide variety of educational opportunities for the people of British Columbia. No less impressive have been the efforts to create a level of organization which ensures that students may successfully transfer credits under prescribed terms and conditions.

Notwithstanding these virtues, the post-secondary enterprise in British Columbia consists of a diverse group of institutions each seeking to develop, to the limits of its mandate, a range of programs and services which distinguish it from other institutions and which are designed to attract students who seek a particular kind of education. Both legislation and custom have contributed to a certain level of institutional autonomy which applies to curriculum design, admission requirements, and the nature of credentials awarded.

In the 60s and 70s a high degree of academic autonomy was appropriate. Institutions were reasonably well-funded, there was a measure of competition within the system, and students tended to earn credentials at one institution and subsequently to enter the workforce. In the year 2000 conditions are different. Funding is constrained, and students display an increasingly high level of mobility as they transfer from one institution to another in pursuit of advanced credentials or changing career interests. In addition, there is increasing competition from institutions outside the province to offer a variety of "online" courses and programs. To respond to these demands, it is essential that there be more effective utilization of limited resources through institutional collaboration and cooperation.

To accomplish this goal, institutions must become more "system" focussed rather than concerned primarily with self preservation and individual development. And, while the incentives to respond to system planning should properly come from government, it would be quite inappropriate for government to undertake a management role. Organizations such as the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer, utilizing the advice of system representatives, are in a position to take a leadership role in better system planning, but institutional compliance will, and should, be voluntary. However, increased efforts by government and other agencies are necessary to convince colleges and universities that greater cooperative planning in initiatives such as the associate degree, block and/or program transfer, innovative transfer pathways, and equitable admission policies are in the best interests of students whose needs should be their first consideration.

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APPENDIX A

BCCAT Sponsored Research Reports

Profiles of B.C. College Transfer Students (1991-92 to present)

Simon Fraser University

1. *Profile of B.C. College Transfer Students Admitted to Simon Fraser University, 1994-95 to 1998-99*, December 1999, 88 pages.
2. *Profile of B.C. College Transfer Students Admitted to Simon Fraser University, 1993-94 to 1997-98*, December 1998, 87 pages.
3. *Profile of B.C. College Transfer Students Admitted to Simon Fraser University, 1992-93 to 1996-97*, February 1998, revised April 1998, 82 pages.
4. *Profile of B.C. College Transfer Students Admitted to Simon Fraser University, 1991-92 to 1995-96*, October 1996, 64 pages.

University of British Columbia

5. *Profile of B.C. College Transfer Students Admitted to the University of British Columbia, 1992-93 to 1996-97*, November 1998, 49 pages.

University of Victoria

6. *Profile of B.C. College Transfer Students Admitted to University of Victoria, 1993-94 to 1997-98*, February 1999, 52 pages.
7. *Profile of B.C. College Transfer Students Admitted to University of Victoria, 1992-93 to 1996-97*, October 1997, 53 pages.

Transcript Assessment Studies

8. *BC College Transfer Credit Evaluation: An Analysis of Students Entering the University of Victoria, Winter 1998/99 Session*, June 1999, 35 pages.
9. *Transfer Credit Assessment for B.C. College Transfer Students Admitted to the University of British Columbia in the 1997/98 Session*, May 1998, 28 pages.
10. *Transfer Credit Evaluation of Students Entering Simon Fraser University from B.C. Colleges during the Calendar Year 1998*, March 2000, 32 pages.

Student Surveys

Investigating Transfer Project

11. *Phase I: Transfer Experiences of Students from Community College to University*, October 1997, 91 pages.
12. *Phase II: Community College Students' Perceptions of Transfer: The Case of Douglas College, November 1998*, 50 pages.
13. *Phase III: A History of Transfer Policy and Practice in British Columbia*, November 1998, 40 pages.
14. *An Assessment of British Columbia's Post-Secondary Education Transfer Issues: the Student Perspective*, March 1998, 156 pages.
15. *Student Transfer Issues Revealed in British Columbia's Post-Secondary Education Student Outcomes Surveys: An Analysis Intended to Enhance the Survey's Future Utility*, November 1996, 56 pages.
16. *Mapping the Realities of First Year Post-Secondary Life: A Study of Student at Three Post-Secondary Institutions*, June 1996, 136 pages.

Admission, Transfer, Retention and Attrition

17. *Today's higher Education Students: Issues of Admission, Retention, Transfer and Attrition in Relation to Changing Student Demographics*, December 1997, 58 pages.

Analysis of Student Tracking Data

18. *Notes from a User Exchange on Link File Analysis*, January 1995, 43 pages.
19. *Briefing on Some Perspectives on Transfer Effectiveness*, September 1994, 18 pages.
20. *Some Perspectives on Transfer Effectiveness in the B.C. Post-Secondary System*, September 1994, 94 pages.

Reports

Administrative Standards and Processes

21. *Task Force on Standards and Processes: Final Report*, December 1997, 23 pages.
22. *Survey of Advising and Admissions Personnel on Administrative Systems Related to Transfer: Results*, Summer 1997, 18 pages.

Articulation

23. *Articulation Telecommunication Project 1998 Report*, October 1999, 41 pages.

Associate Degree

24. *The Associate Degree as a Transfer Credential: A Discussion Paper*, May 1999, 6 pages.
25. *Proposed Amended Requirements for Associate of Arts Degree & Associate of Science Degree*, April 1999, 3 pages.
26. *Requirements for Associate of Arts Degree and Associate of Science Degree*, adopted May 1991, revised March 1998, 2 pages.
27. *Survey of Registrars about the Associate Degree: Report on Findings*, October 1998, 16 pages.

Transfer

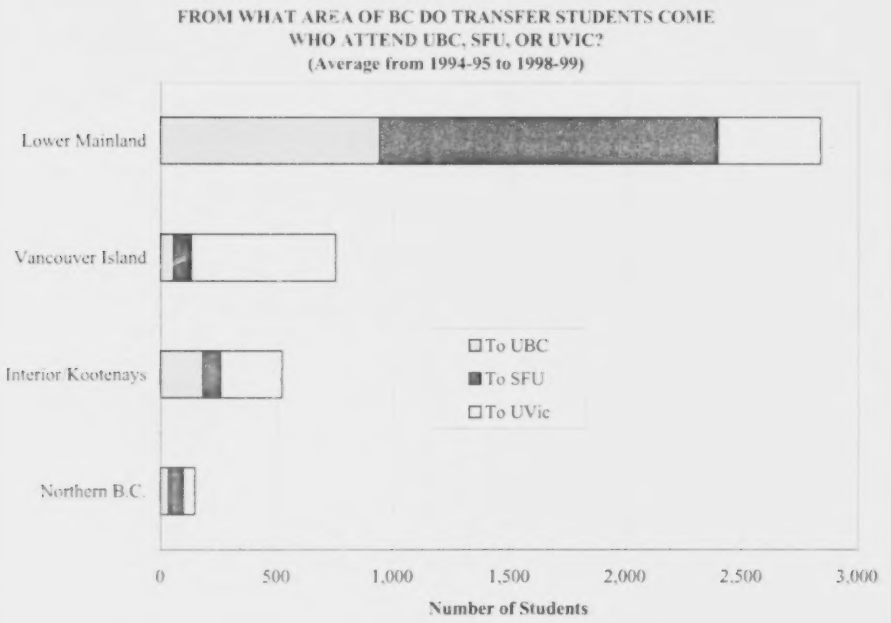
28. *Transfer Rates: How to measure and for what purpose? A discussion paper*, November 1999, 13 pages.
29. *Investigating Transfer: The Students' Perspective*, July 1999, 4 pages.
30. *Transfer: What's the Problem? A Special Report from the Transfer Innovations Committee*, April 1999, 4 pages.
31. *Block Transfer Project: Update*, February 1998, 4 pages.
32. *Block Transfer Project: Consultation and Response*, December 1997, 29 pages.
33. *Block Transfer: Issues and Options. A Discussion Paper*, April 1997, 12 pages.

Other Publications

34. *British Columbia Transfer TIPS: Transfer Information for Post-Secondary Success*, First Edition, July 1999, 32 pages.
35. *British Columbia Transfer Guide*, published annually 1990-91 to 1999-2000, current volume, 415 pages.

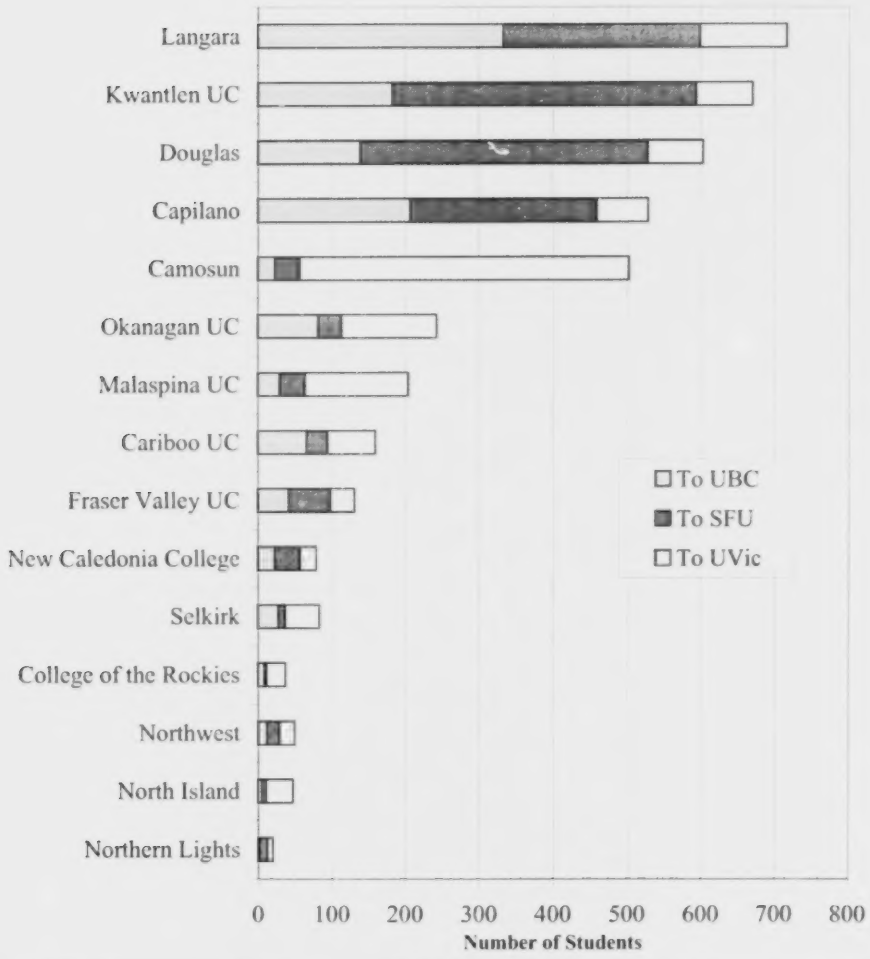
APPENDIX B

Note: The charts in Appendixes B, C and D were prepared by Walter Wattamaniuk, Director of Analytical Studies, SFU, from transfer student profile reports prepared for BCCAT by each of the three universities identified. The UVic and SFU data is averaged for the period 1994/95 to 1998/99. The latest UBC data covers 1993/94 to 1997/98.

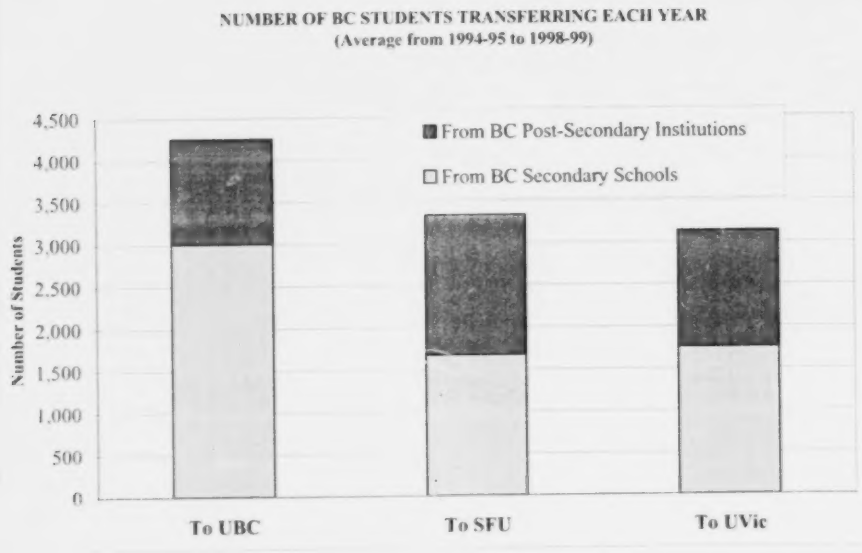


APPENDIX C

FROM WHICH BC POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS DO TRANSFER STUDENTS COME WHO ATTEND UBC, SFU, OR UVIC?
(Average from 1994-95 to 1998-99)



APPENDIX D


NUMBER OF BC STUDENTS TRANSFERRING EACH YEAR
(Average from 1994-95 to 1998-99)
Number of Students
4,500
4,000
3,500
3,000
2,500
2,000
1,500
1,000
500
0
From BC Post-Secondary Institutions
From BC Secondary Schools
To UBC
To SFU
To UVic